

## 2002 ADDRESS BY SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE JIM KREIDER

Good afternoon everyone.

Ladies and gentlemen, just four months ago, when the nation collectively held its breath as tragedy unfolded, and our loved ones were calling us home to be with them during those difficult times, this body did what no other legislature in the United States did.

It stood firm.

This body put the interests of the people before its own.

This House of Representatives decided to send a message that terrorism would never be rewarded in our democracy.

You rose to the challenge and passed a comprehensive prescription drug package and kept a commitment to our seniors.

I am proud of this institution and I am proud of you.

As your Speaker, your colleague, and your friend, I want to begin today by saying thank you for your service to all Missourians. And I invite all those in the upper galleries to join me in a round of applause as we salute American Democracy and the efforts of those who serve it.

The challenge before us is what some you have heard me refer to as "The Perfect Storm."

Today, we begin what for most of us will be our last session in the Missouri House of Representatives. We are losing almost one-half of our experienced public servants.

Now is our moment of truth. As you all know by now we will be asked to cut nearly \$1 billion dollars in state services.

To most Missourians, that may not seem difficult in a budget that is \$19 billion dollars.

Yet, you must consider that nearly \$12 billion of that \$19 billion dollars is federal and state mandates that we cannot touch. That leaves \$7 billion dollars to cut from.

The fact is that everyone likes to say they want to cut the fat. And on the campaign trail it is certainly popular to run against "big government."

But when we get here and find out that cutting big government means that someone gets less service and that 'someone' is a child, or an unemployed worker, or a single mother, or one of our seniors, the enthusiasm for deep cuts fades away.

Then it is not difficult to see why those campaigns to "end big government" rapidly turn into promises to "fight for working families."

Will we rise to the challenge?

Will we have the guts to make the tough choices?

What will our priorities be?

The number one priority of the Missouri House of Representatives is to fully fund the foundation formula for public education.

Public education is the very foundation of our democracy.

Ladies and gentlemen, public education is the door to equal opportunity in this country.

Horace Mann said: the public school is the greatest discovery ever made.

Public education is how we achieve Dr. Martin Luther King's dream for America.

It is what turns the hopes of our children in to the realities of the future.

It is what allows them to become engineers, teachers, nurses, builders, artists, writers, farmers, and yes, even Representatives.

So that one day, when our children sit in these chairs, it will not be to gain political favor but to return a favor.

And to invest in the future of their children.

The state constitution states that maintaining a public education system is our most important responsibility.

We must fully fund the foundation formula for public education.

To fully fund public education, this body will lead by example.

As of today, the Missouri House of Representatives is proud to announce that by cutting travel, eliminating senior-level jobs, and streamlining our operations, we have saved approximately \$2 million from our own budget.

And therefore I urge the Budget Chair and the House Budget Committee to redirect those cost savings towards public education.

Let there be no question that the House of Representatives takes its responsibility to our future very seriously.

And, with this first step, we challenge the Missouri Senate and each department and agency to do their part.

Follow our example. Make tough choices -- and help keep our commitment to the future of Missouri by fully funding public education.

Now let's get back to work!